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ABSTRACT

Based on Mary Shelley's novel "Frankenstein," this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that active readers interpret a novel (its characters, plot, setting, and theme) in different ways; and the great literature can be and has been adapted in many ways over time. The main activity of the lesson involves students staging a mock trial in civil court of Victor Frankenstein on charges of negligence, malpractice, and emotional distress. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:
Frankenstein

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two class periods

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

CREDIT: Melanie Simon, a former junior high and high school English teacher and current freelance educator.

OBJECTIVES: Students will understand the following:

1. Active readers interpret a novel—its characters, plot, setting, and theme—in different ways.

2. Great literature can be and has been adapted in many ways over time.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

Simplified legal guides

Dictionaries

Space to set up mock trial

PROCEDURE:

1. Point out to the class that in the United States these days, when litigation is so popular, a new version of *Frankenstein* set here might show the monster, before going off to the Arctic, suing his creator in civil court for negligence, malpractice, and emotional and physical distress. Tell students that they are going to stage a mock trial of Victor Frankenstein for the above-mentioned charges. The trial, like the novel, can have science-fiction or fantasy elements.

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2. Explain that the case will be heard in civil court, where a suit is brought by one individual (plaintiff) against another (defendant), whereas in criminal court, the case is between the state (prosecution) and the defendant.

3. Proceed by making sure students know what the charges are. They can research the definitions, used in the legal profession, of *negligence*, *malpractice*, and *emotional and physical distress*. To find definitions, students may use materials prepared for jurors in local courts; in addition, some college-level and most unabridged dictionaries will give law-specific definitions for at least *negligenc* a nd *malpractice*.

4. Ask students to help you determine what roles the following characters will play in the trial, and then assign students to those roles:

- Victor Frankenstein
- the ghost of William Frankenstein
- the ghost of Justine Moritz
- the ghost of Henry Clerval
- the ghost of Elizabeth Lavenza
- the monster
- witnesses for the plaintiff, including medical expert and ethicist
- witnesses for the defendant, including medical expert and ethicist
- attorney for the plaintiff
- attorney for the defendant
- judge

Because this mock trial is a civil case, assign six jurors and one alternate. Take the role of bailiff, the person who keeps order in the court.

5. Go over with students the order in which they may carry out their mock trial:

- opening statement by plaintiff's attorney
- opening statement by defendant's attorney
- interrogation of plaintiff's witnesses by attorney for the plaintiff
- cross-examination of plaintiff's witnesses by attorney for the defendant
- interrogation of defendant's witnesses by attorney for the defendant
- cross-examination of defendant's witnesses by attorney for the plaintiff
- closing arguments by both attorneys

6. Give each participating student time to prepare for his or her role by reviewing the novel.

7. During the trial, the judge may intervene to help the witnesses and to respond to objections by attorneys. After both sides have rested their cases, the judge should remind the jury of its obligations. Then you can invite the jury to deliberate in front of the class. The jury should submit a verdict in writing to the judge, who will read it aloud.

8. Determine for your class whether the trial will end with the jury's verdict, or, if found guilty, the defendant will hear what damages he must pay to the monster. The judge, the original jurors, or a new panel of jurors may determine damages.

9. Ask the students who did not participate in the mock trial to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the students taking part in the mock trial.

ADAPTATIONS:

Instead of conducting a full-blown mock trial, initiate a discussion in class of what each side would claim in such a trial. What position would each side take, and what kind of evidence could each side offer?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Some scholars have used *Frankenstein* as a central piece in their argument against the development of cloning technology. Others argue that the problem was not with Victor Frankenstein's scientific methods but with his responses to his creation—that we should develop cloning technology, but use it wisely. Debate whether the novel is either "for" or "against" cloning. Support your argument with passages from the book.

2. One of the tragedies of *Frankenstein* is the refusal of other characters in the novel to recognize the monster as a full human being. Brainstorm a list of the qualities that make us human. Which of these qualities does the monster have? Which does he not have?

3. Discuss the role that nature plays in Shelley's novel. Include examples that support your answer.

4. Analyze Mary Shelley's use of setting throughout the novel. Why, for example, does she use the Arctic as the setting for Victor Frankenstein's final confrontation with his creation?

5. When *Frankenstein* was first published in 1818, it had mixed reviews. Not everyone understood or enjoyed it. Today, however, we think of the book as a classic. Speculate about why some important pieces of literature aren't treasured right away, while others that are immediately popular eventually fade away.

6. Compare Victor Frankenstein with the monster he created. In what ways are their life experiences similar? In what ways are they different?

EVALUATION:

You can evaluate students participating in the mock trial using the three-point rubric:

- **Three points:** creating the role and staying in role very well; very well thought out questions or statements; clearly delivered questions or statements

- **Two points:** creating the role and staying in role moderately well; fairly well thought out questions or statements; most questions or statements well delivered

- **One point:** poor job of creating the role and staying in role; questions or statements not clearly thought out; questions or statements not well delivered

You can ask your students to contribute to the assessment rubric by determining the elements that go into clear oral delivery.

EXTENSION:

Frankenstein on Broadway
Over the years, there have been numerous cinematic versions of *Frankenstein.* Few playwrights, however, have attempted to adapt the book for the stage. Divide your students into groups, and assign each group a different chapter or sequence of chapters from the novel. Each group should produce for the rest of the class a small stage version of its chapter(s), complete with dialogue, stage directions, and minimal sets and costumes. The group's goal should be to capture the dramatic essence of a scene without performing the entire scene. Not all of the novel's dialogue, for example, needs to appear in the scene. You might also want to encourage students to take liberties with the plot—by casting a female monster, for example, or writing a different ending.

Modern-Day Monster
What if *Frankenstein* were set in modern times? Some of the ideas it raises would certainly be the same, but the novel could also be drastically different. If the story were set within the last few years in students' own hometown, what would be different or new to the story? How would the residents react to the monster, for example? What might the monster look like? How would it be created? What would the Victor Frankenstein character be like? Ask your students to consider these questions (as well as any others they might think of) and then write an outline for a modern-day *Frankenstein.*

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Mary Shelley: Frankenstein's Creator: First Science Fiction Writer
Joan Kane Nichols. Conari Press, 1998.
Students of this gothic tale are drawn to the life and mind of its 19-year-old creator, Mary Shelley. The story of her life is as gripping as the novel she wrote. High school students will relate to her story of risk-taking and trying to stay true to her own values and goals in life.

Mary Shelly: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters
Anne K. Mellor. Routledge, 1990.
This book will fascinate students of *Frankenstein* and other gothic tales. It connects Shelley's fears as a 19-year-old woman to the creation of her universal literary monster.

WEB LINKS:

Frankenstein: Penetrating the Secrets of Nature
This exhibition looks at the world from which Mary Shelley came, at how popular culture has embraced the Frankenstein story, and at how Shelley's creation continues to illuminate the blurred, uncertain boundaries of what we consider "acceptable" science.
http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/frankenstein/frankhome.html

Resources for the Study of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein
Extensive link of online resources including e-texts and movie resources.
http://www.georgetown.edu/irvinemj/english016/franken/franken.html

Frankenstein by Project Gutenberg
A public domain copy of the e-text of Frankenstein is available for downloading.
http://promo.net/pg/_titles/F.html

Mary Shelley and Frankenstein
Everything a teacher or student might need in the study of Shelley and her monster.
http://www.desert-fairy.com

A Frankenstein Study
Complete site with essays, Frankenstein FAQs, information, and links.
http://www.watershed.winnipeg.mb.ca/Frankenstein.html

VOCABULARY:

anonymous
Not named or identified; of unknown authorship or origin.
Context:
Frankenstein was published anonymously in London in 1818.

benevolent
Marked by or disposed to doing good.
Context:
I was benevolent once; my soul glowed with love and understanding.

formidable
Causing fear, dread, or apprehension; tending to inspire awe or wonder.
Context:
Most people thought it was a very powerful, strong, formidable subject.

obsession
A persistent, disturbing preoccupation with an often unreasonable idea or feeling.
Context:
Victor Frankenstein's dream of creating life became his obsession.

poignant
Painfully affecting the feelings.
Context:
Frankenstein illustrates the poignant struggle of an outcast trying to fit in to society.

predatory
Inclined or intended to injure or exploit others for personal gain or profit.
Context:
The experience of being abandoned drives him into this violent, predatory rage.

progeny
Offspring of animals or plants.
Context:
Mary Shelley refers to her book as "my hideous progeny."

surreal
Having the intense irrational reality of a dream.
Context:
It is imaginatively described as a kind of wasteland, a surreal chase.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: language arts

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the reading process.

Benchmarks:

Benchmark: Determines figurative, idiomatic, and technical meanings of terms through context.

Benchmark: Identifies and analyzes the philosophical assumptions and basic beliefs underlying an author's work.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: language arts

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks:

Benchmark: Understands influences on a reader's response to a text (e.g., personal values, perspectives, and experiences).

Benchmark: Analyzes the effectiveness of complex elements of plot (e.g., time frame, cause-and-effect relationships, conflicts, resolutions).

Benchmark: Makes connections among literary works based on theme (e.g., universal themes in literature of different cultures, major themes in American literature).

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
Mary Shelly's chilling gothic tale is really a complex comment on the late-19th century period of intellectual and scientific growth in Europe. Yet this seminal horror story is still relevant today in a world of radical new scientific technology.

View Video Clip ⓟ | View Lesson Plan ⓟ

Download Comprehension Questions & Answers ⓟ

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
Frankenstein: The Making of a Monster

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. How did the Industrial Revolution influence *Frankenstein*?

2. What changed the monster into a violent creature in *Frankenstein*?

3. How did *Frankenstein* come to be written?

4. At the time that Shelley was writing *Frankenstein*, what newly investigated phenomenon of science seemed to suggest that reanimation was possible?

5. Why did Mary Shelley publish *Frankenstein* anonymously?

6. What dramatic event serves as one of the major turning points in the monster's life?

7. What are some of the themes in *Frankenstein*?

8. What did the monster want Victor to create for him? Why?

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Frankenstein: The Making of a Monster

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. How did the Industrial Revolution influence *Frankenstein*?
During the Industrial Revolution, science, chemistry, and the origin of life were some of the major preoccupations of society. Mary Shelley incorporated these popular scientific fields into her novel as a way to comment on the fascinations of her time.

2. What changed the monster into a violent creature in *Frankenstein*?
The monster became enraged with his fate in life—to be alone forever and to be rejected by humans.

3. How did *Frankenstein* come to be written?
*Frankenstein*was written as part of a ghost story writing contest between Mary Shelley, her husband Percy Shelley, and their friends.

4. At the time that Shelley was writing *Frankenstein*, what newly investigated phenomenon of science seemed to suggest that reanimation was possible?
Electricity, which could affect the human body even after death, seemed to have the properties necessary for reanimation.

5. Why did Mary Shelley publish *Frankenstein* anonymously?
Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein* anonymously because she thought the public would receive her novel more seriously if it did not know that a woman wrote it.

6. What dramatic event serves as one of the major turning points in the monster's life?
One of the major turning points in the monster's life is his murder of Victor Frankenstein's brother. The murder reveals that the monster has become no different than the people around him—the people who would have murdered him.

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7. What are some of the themes in *Frankenstein*?
Some of the themes in *Frankenstein* are the loneliness of being an outcast of society, the monstrous side of humankind, the human need for companionship, and the ethics of creating a living being.

8. What did the monster want Victor to create for him? Why?
The monster wanted Victor to create a companion and mate for him, so that he would not be so lonely and could live without cursing the man who had created him.

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